

## U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

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### Improved process for accrediting contractor employees nets one of Army's first Lean Six Sigma awards

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**HEIDELBERG, Germany** -- What may seem like a small idea to improve a single administrative task actually saved U.S. Army Europe serious time and money, and earned Armand C. Lepage an award from the Department of the Army.



U.S. ARMY PHOTO

Armand Lepage, chief of USAREUR's Department of Defense Contractor Personnel Office (right), accepts one of the first Department of the Army Lean Six Sigma Excellence Program awards from Secretary of the Army Pete Geren in the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes, Oct. 10.

In 2005 former Secretary of the Army Francis J. Harvey officially introduced the Army to the Lean Six Sigma program that focused on improving work efficiency, obtaining quality results and reducing costs.

Since that time the Army has saved or avoided costs of approximately \$1 billion using the LSS approach to problem solving, said Jack Van Den Beldt, U.S. Army Europe LSS program manager.

“Lean Six Sigma is a business practice used to streamline work processes in order to eliminate wasting time, money and material in areas (in which) the Army needed improvement,” said Lepage, chief of USAREUR's Department of Defense Contractor Personnel Office (DOCPER). “Secretary Harvey was quite keen on implementing Lean Six Sigma throughout the Army, and before introducing a concept of that nature it has to have what is called a deployment.”

Groundwork for the deployment was laid in 2005, and LSS training was launched across the Army in 2006. Senior Army leaders and civilian employees were trained to use LSS tools and develop their business management skills, said Lepage.

As the chief responsible for ensuring all compliance with international agreements under which DoD contractor personnel in Germany and Italy receive NATO Status of Forces Agreement privileges, Lepage said LSS methodology helped restructure the status accreditation process for contractor employees in Italy.

The status accreditation process allows accredited DoD contractor employees to receive the same SOFA privileges as military and DoD civilian personnel, said Lepage.

Lepage and his staff came up with a solution to reduce the processing time for reviewing and approving status accreditation for contractor personnel entering Italy.

The idea behind cutting down the processing time for the contract process was to get contractor employees into Italy faster, said Lepage. "If we get them into country faster, we save money. So you want to get boots on the ground as fast as you can."

In Italy, all DoD contract employees are required to have a "mission visa" processed through an Italian consulate, but the requirements for those visas were not the same at every Italian consulate, Lepage explained.

"What we were finding out was that there was no clear and definitive piece of paper that all Italian consulates would accept so that we could move contractors into Italy," Lepage said. "Working with the military side of the U.S. Embassy in Rome, who coordinated with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we came up with a way of streamlining and automating that process and generating a single piece of paper on embassy letterhead that Italian consulates throughout the world would accept as definitive."

Before Lepage and his team could begin generating the new documentation, an old database that relied on using spreadsheets and e-mailing documents back and forth between contractors and the DOCPER office in Seckenheim, Germany had to be overhauled. The new process would be done entirely online, allowing contractors to upload any documents needed to complete the accreditation process, said Lepage.

"We came up with a process that was largely an automated solution, that generated paperwork faster," said Lepage. The new processing system allows the entire SOFA accreditation process to be completed online.

"(Contractor personnel) simply go online to our Web-based application, fill out the online forms, upload the necessary documents, and hit the 'submit' button. We receive an e-mail notification that they've submitted, and take it from there," he said.

"We ended up saving about \$330,000, just in moving contractors more quickly from point A to point B."

As a result of his improvements, Lepage and his team were recently awarded one of the first Department of the Army Lean Six Sigma Excellence Program awards by Secretary of the Army Pete Geren.

“The quality of the project, how he did it and the amount of savings involved is what really distinguished him and his team from the other award nominees,” said Van Den Beldt. “He improved a process that basically had contractors sitting around and not being able to do their jobs because we didn’t get them properly processed with the right clearances.

“So he and his team figured out how to move the contractor process along. The fact that he had real ‘no kidding’ savings coming out of that, and used all of the tools he learned in training, is a credit to him,” Van Den Beldt added.

The adoption of LSS practices can improve nearly any process, he said, from wait times for vehicle registrations, ID cards and deployment flights, to warehouse operations that can grind to a standstill when bottlenecks occur.

“Better, faster, smarter. It’s all about keeping people out of the waiting room,” said Van Den Beldt. “Getting rid of the waste -- and waste is anything the customers think is wasteful, which is usually their time and resources.”



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